

CPD can seriously improve your teaching

– survey summary

During this year, I sent a questionnaire to ASE Scotland members to explore the value of short CPD courses. There has been some negative press about the value of such events and this had concerned me. As an active ASE member, I have engaged in a professional lifetime of attending and presenting such events. ASE Scotland offers a full programme of short twilight sessions and whole-day events to support professional development. We also run a two-day annual conference, which is founded on short CPD sessions. It was important to me and to the ASE Scotland Committee that we evaluated this dimension of our efforts. The results presented here draw from 39 responses. Although the sample is limited, there are some important messages emerging from this survey.

Of the respondents, 66% taught in secondary school and 34% in primary. The majority of respondents, 77%, had attended several CPD events in the last year. Only a single respondent said that they 'rarely attended any CPD'.

Survey part 1: General impressions of the availability and influence of CPD

Two clear messages emerged from this section.

- CPD can and does have a significant influence on professional practice. 95% of respondents agreed that CPD had changed the way they approach teaching and learning. Similar proportions said that CPD had broadened their horizons and influenced their practice.
- For the majority, 69%, there seems to be plenty of opportunities for attending CPD. However, for a significant minority, (about a third of respondents), there was insufficient CPD available in their area.

Survey part 2: The features of effective CPD

Respondents were invited to identify the most significant factors that contributed to effective CPD. In order of significance, these factors were:

Feature of good CPD	number of times cited (39 max)
The quality of the presenter	30
Challenges my thinking	22
Gives confidence in unfamiliar areas	18
Resources to take away	15
Focuses on teaching strategies	13
Ideas to use next week	11
Meeting other teachers	10

It is clear that the planning and style of presentation of a CPD experience is a critical determinant for success. Features that did not rank highly as determining a successful experience included:

Includes tasks to do	3
Offers tasks to do	2
In school time not my time	2
Quality of the venue	1

Tasks to carry out as part of the CPD experience seem to be of less value than finding ways to challenge thinking. It also seems that teachers are willing to give up their own time to experience CPD.

Survey part 3: Examples of good CPD

Respondents were invited to describe particularly effective CPD and to suggest how these events had influenced their practice. A wide range of specific events were identified, some offering names of presenters and specific topics.

The emerging messages included:

- Formative assessment sessions have been particularly successful;
- General teaching strategies, for example questioning and managing behaviour, have been well received;
- Events that challenged conventional thinking were well received; and
- Events that give confidence to try out new ideas are welcome.

CPD was thought to be poor when presenters were ill-prepared, in particular when responding to questions. Cascaded messages from a nominated person who just happened to attend a session were not as helpful as sessions where national expert practitioners were on hand.

For those who organise and deliver CPD, there are some pointers here towards best practice. I would like to thank all members who sent in their returns. There is a strong message here, which suggests that the right type of short CPD course can have and has had a profound influence on the professional development of teachers.

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